

# GETTING THE FIRE SAFETY WORD OUT IN WEST VIRGINIA

## LEADING COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the  
Executive Fire Officer Program.

July 2007

## Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another,

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Abstract

The citizens of West Virginia suffered from preventable loss and injury. Using print media for fire prevention and safety education is a resource that has not been used effectively. The purpose of this research was to identify and review the components of print media and prioritize the topics for a fire prevention and safety education program.

Research answered questions defining the priority and common concerns from community to community relating to fire prevention and safety education, optimizing reader interest and retention and delivering the same messages in various communities.

Descriptive research was used through literature review and interviews with fire service leaders and print media representatives. Recommendations were made to improve partnering with media, coordinate programs and promote written safety messages

## Table of Contents

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Abstract .....   | page 3  |
| Table of Contents.....                                 | page 4  |
| Introduction.....                                      | page 5  |
| Background and Significance.....                       | page 6  |
| Literature Review.....                                 | page 8  |
| Procedures.....  | page 17 |
| Limitations and Variances.....                         | page 19 |
| Results - Interviews with Fire Service Leaders.....    | page 20 |
| - Interview with a Journalism Professor.....           | page 26 |
| - Interviews with Print Media Representatives.....     | page 31 |
| Discussion.....  | page 35 |
| Recommendations.....                                   | page 40 |
| Reference List.....                                    | page 45 |
| Appendix A: Interview Questions.....                   | page 49 |
| Appendix B: Interview List.....                        | page 50 |
| Appendix C: West Virginia's Daily Newspapers.....      | page 51 |
| Appendix D: West Virginia's Non-Daily Newspapers.....  | page 52 |
| Appendix E: West Virginia's College Newspapers.....    | page 54 |
| Appendix F: State and National Press Associations..... | page 55 |

## Introduction

Public Education for fire prevention safety has always been a major concern of the fire service. Preventing fires is undoubtedly the best way to prevent the loss of life and property and improve the quality of life for all. Twenty years ago, The National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control noted that fire prevention was the key to effective and efficient fire protection services. The fire service in West Virginia is no exception; the citizens suffer from the effects of preventable injury and loss. Unfortunately, we can never report that we have done enough to prevent fires for as long as there are fires, we need to improve our methods and strive harder in prevention and education.

Fire prevention through education is very difficult to plan, implement and maintain for a variety of reasons, compounded by an ever changing society. One strategy, the use of print media has been inconsistent and sporadic, making a standardized program difficult to promote and sustain. Print media has long been a resource that has not been effectively utilized for fire prevention and public education. Benjamin Franklin often wrote of fire prevention in the Pennsylvania Gazette in the early 1700s.

Although the broad intent of this research was to promote a form of fire prevention, the purpose of this research was to identify and review the various components of print media in public education and determine what topics should become a priority in fire prevention and safety education. Additionally, thought and concern should be given to ensure that those messages are consistent from community to community.

The material in this research provides information that can improve public safety education and fire prevention in West Virginia. The information obtained can be used by both

career and volunteer organizations in both rural and urban communities to better utilize print media as a resource to reduce the loss of life and property.

Information was obtained by using literature review, internet research and interviews with numerous fire service leaders and educators, print media representatives and a journalism professor. The descriptive research method was used for this project and the following questions were answered.

1. What should be the priority topics of fire safety education and prevention in West Virginia? What are the common safety and prevention concerns from community to community?
2. How can print media be written to optimize reader interest and retention?
3. How can the same safety and prevention messages be given in various communities?

### Background and Significance

The fire service of West Virginia is comprised of 449 fire departments in 55 counties that responded to 3,997 structure fires in fiscal year 2006; 2,778 (69.5%) of those fires were residential. Fire departments range from very small “rural” volunteer with very few emergency calls per year to larger “urban” career departments that respond to several emergencies daily. Some fire departments respond only to fire related emergencies while others are considered “all-hazard” response agencies that not only respond to fires, but medical emergencies, hazardous materials incidents and countless other request for assistance. Many departments respond to medical emergencies but do not transport the sick or injured while other departments provide emergency medical services (EMS) with transportation capability.

West Virginia fire departments struggle with many challenges that effect their day to day operations. Some of those challenges become a priority for the continuity of services and unfortunately take time and resources away from other areas of fire department responsibilities. Issues such as funding, increased training requirements and staffing restraints have had a negative impact on fire prevention and public education programs. For some fire departments, prevention and education programs are at the bottom of the priority list while for others these programs simply do not exist. Kiurski (2000) believes, “The local fire department is responsible for educating the community on fire prevention and safety.”

The West Virginia State Fire Marshal’s Office is the lead agency for the state’s fire service and operates under the authority of the West Virginia State Fire Commission. By law, {§29-3-12 (a)(1)}, the West Virginia State Fire Marshal’s Office is responsible for fire prevention. The Fire Marshal’s office works closely with the state’s fire department’s and supports fire prevention programs in many different areas. Unfortunately as with most other fire service organizations, they are limited by funding and staffing restraints.

The state of West Virginia has a population of 1,808,344 (U.S. Census, 2000). County populations range from 200,073 in Kanawha County to 5,873 in Wirt County. The median age of the state’s population is 38.9 years old.

West Virginia has several forms of media and public information systems such as television, radio and print media. A variety of print media outlets are available ranging from daily newspapers to monthly magazines. This applied research project focused primarily on the newspaper industry, both weekly and daily print.

Unfortunately, articles and information in the print media concerning fire prevention and safety are sporadic and inconsistent. Incidents of loss and tragedy grab the headlines for a brief

period following a critical event then fades off as another news event unfolds. Occasionally, National Fire Prevention Week gathers some interest and column space as does, information related to outdoor burning during times of drought and wildfire season.

Topics discussed in Unit 2 (Assessing Community Risk), Unit 3 (Building Support) and Unit 4 (Intervention Strategies) of the National Fire Academy's (NFA) Leading Community Risk Reduction (LCRR) course led to the need to access methods of utilizing the media, especially print media, as a tool to promote safety and prevention. Additionally there was a need to define the most important safety concerns in various communities and research methods to ensure consistency in public fire safety education from community to community.

Improving public education and fire prevention programs has always been a challenge to the fire service and is becoming more of an issue than many realize. Increases in terrorism concerns, communications technology, media exposure and political interests are bringing the issue of prevention to the "center" stage and will force the fire service to improve its efforts to reduce loss through prevention and education.

Information obtained through this research supports the United States Fire Administration (USFA) goals of responding appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues and to reduce the loss of life from fire related hazards.

### Literature Review

Literature review consisted of vast internet searches and review of web-based material, research of periodical and text publications and previous Applied Research Projects on file in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Publications were also obtained from the author's personal library, the public library system and the



administrative library of the Charleston Fire Department. Additionally, informational documents were obtained from the WV State Fire Marshal's Office, the United State Fire Administration and from the WV Press Association.

The use of literature review gained information on journalism and the various mechanics and issues of writing. Additionally, information was obtained relating to the print media industry in West Virginia and provided considerable statistical data and current information on changes being experienced by the print media in general. Information was also obtained concerning current public fire education programs and issues in various communities.

Fire prevention has always been a concern for the fire service and improvements and progress have been made in during the last couple of decades. Kiurski agrees, "In just the past 30 years, the fire service has made significant progress in the area of fire safety education. Prior to the 1973 report America Burning, educational programs were few and far between for a number of reasons." The fire service has made a difference, but there is still much more that can be done. America Burning reported in 1973 that fire claims 12,000 lives every year and injures 300,000. The USFA reported 3,675 fire fatalities and 17,925 injuries from fires in 2005; what a difference we have made.

Over the past few years, our society has witnessed an explosion of media resources and the manners in which we can receive information. The television and internet industry have grown in ways that the fire service did not predict or expect. A local emergency incident can become a national news event in a matter of minutes and be broadcast over many national outlets to millions of people. Technological advances can now share information across the country and bring attention to countless situations. Just a few years ago, news and information dealing with an emergency incident was never heard of outside the local area and now an incident in a far

away state can gather interest and concern that many local fire departments need to address in their local communities. News is anything that other people are interested in (Horowitz, 2000). People are interested in tragic events and more importantly, in this era of terrorism, prevention is on everyone's mind. A bus accident 600 miles away is now leading the public and community leaders to ask, "Are we prepared for some thing like that?" An apartment fire with fatalities in another corner of the country leads to another question, "Can that happen here?"

The internet and web-based industry has also grown exponentially and although it is now common for fire departments and local newspapers to have their own web-sites, many have not grasped this opportunity to its fullest potential for prevention and safety education. Internet sites have almost infinite ability and space to share and archive information.

The print media industry too, has grown in ways that have not been realized. Magazines, journals and various forms of print are now available for just about every subject, profession and special interest. The newspaper industry has also experienced changes that have led to modifications in the way it must operate. "For a third consecutive year, daily and Sunday circulation of America's newspapers fell sharply in 2006" says Edmonds. To keep things in perspective, the magnitude of the losses over all is not by itself devastating. Even better, the growth in audience online may be more than making up for the losses in print (Edmonds)

In West Virginia, 23 of the state's 24 (95.8%) daily newspapers are on-line, while 29 of the state's 54 (53.7%) weekly papers have web-sites. Although printed newspapers have deadlines and limited space for articles, websites are virtually limitless with greater access, more space and have the ability to add, remove, archive and configure in ways appealing to the public.

The drop in circulation rates have led to issues other than just selling newspapers. Circulation now accounts for only about 20% of a typical newspaper's revenue (Groves, 2007).

Newspaper publishers look at many different areas to sustain business and profit while editors must constantly give people what they want to attract readers and equally important, give it to them the way they want it. Since 2000, the time a typical adult reports spending with a newspaper fell from 201 hours a year to a projected 175 hours in 2007. For the Internet, average hours were expected to rise to 195, up from 104 in 2000 (Associated Press, 2006). These statistics show that although getting information in the newspaper is important, it is not the only way that newspaper companies distribute information.

The demographics of who is reading the newspaper is also a factor in developing articles and may have an impact on how and what safety and prevention messages that the fire service should focus on.

Edmonds reports that newspaper readership, across all age groups, is ebbing. And that problem is compounded by the fact that readership continues to skew toward older people, raising questions about the future. In 2006, just 35% of people between 18 and 24 read a newspaper in an average week. That is down from 42% in 1999. In contrast, 67% of adults over the age of 65 read a newspaper in an average week in 2006.

Information that is placed in print can be of various formats and be received by various means. Articles can be developed by local reporters on staff for the newspaper or be obtained from other sources such as the Associated Press or Reuters. Columns may be written by newspaper staff and editors or obtained from outside sources such as independent or syndicated writers. Inserts, special tabloids and other types of formats can also be found in newspapers and are generally purchased or paid for separately.

Placing a column in the newspaper can be as simple as using a computer program to cut and paste the information verbatim into the appropriate space, but is frequently modified by the

editor. Articles and news stories may also be written by research done entirely by a reporter.

Articles may be stimulated by a press release obtained by a variety of sources. Press releases are not always placed in the newspaper as originally developed but may be used as a source for a reporter to write the piece.

Care should be given to remember that the press release has two audiences; the newspaper staff that is deciding whether or not to use it and the general public that it was intended for. PressReleaseWriting.com offers the following tips:

1. Make sure the information is newsworthy.
2. Tell the audience that the information is intended for them and why they should continue to read it.
3. Start with a brief description of the news, then distinguish who announced it, and not the other way around.
4. Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
5. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
6. Avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language.
7. Deal with the facts.
8. Provide as much Contact information as possible: Individual to Contact, address, phone, fax, email, Web site address.
9. Make sure you wait until you have something with enough substance to issue a release.
10. Make it as easy as possible for media representatives to do their jobs.

Writing a press release is, not too different from writing any other document (How-Infoscavenger). Although, certain basic rules and components must be followed to give your piece a fighting chance on the editor's desk; the key components of a press release are the headline, the opening paragraph, the body and the closing paragraph.

The headline is extremely important. In about ten words -- or less -- you need to grab the attention of the editor.....you have just a few words to make your release stand out among the many others editors receive on any given day (Hansen). The first paragraph also referred to as the opening paragraph or summary lead can be critical. This paragraph must explain "the five Ws and one H" of the story -- the who, what, when, where, why, and how (Hansen). This paragraph should also have a catch, something that makes the reader want to read more. The reader will make the decision to consider reading your piece or move on to the next interesting item or article.

When writing the body of the piece, Hansen recommends a strategy called the inverted pyramid. This strategy places the most important and critical information and quotes first. Hansen says, "This inverted pyramid technique is used so that if editors need to cut the story to fit space constraints, they can cut from the end without losing critical information." The closing paragraph should repeat only the most critical information and must include the author and contact information such as an e-mail address and phone numbers.

There are many different ways and processes that can be used to write. Three types that may be useful to the fire service in fire prevention are technical writing, descriptive writing, and cause and effect writing. Laan and Julian (2001) report, "a technical writer is someone who conveys information about a technical subject, directed at a specific audience for a specific purpose...good technical writers convey information clearly, briefly and in an easy to understand

language.” Descriptive writing is used when you know enough about a subject (or are interested enough to investigate it) to provide sufficient details to give the reader a clear picture or a dominant impression of the thing described (McCall, 1998). McCall further explains, “Cause and effect writing is used when you wish to show the results (effect) of some event, idea, or action. You may develop the theme by showing how the cause led up to the effect, or you can state the effect(s) first.

For some, writing press releases, articles and a host of other written documents comes natural. For others, after hours and hours of college education, writing is still a challenge and is almost a dreaded duty. Unfortunately for the fire service, Journalism and English courses are not part of standardized firefighting training and more importantly are not promoted as a necessary skill in the whole realm of the business; the business of making communities safer. “At no other time has the fire service had a greater need for literacy. All signs indicate a future in which reading and writing skills for firefighters will be essential to the survival of the fire service.” says Cornell (2005).

At times writing is not easy, at other times it does come natural, especially when there is a driving force, special interest or passion behind it; call it being inspired if you will. Emerson (1993) agrees, “Not that a lot of action results from that inspiration, but reading positive-focus articles make us all feel good; brightens our days.” Enjoy writing. If you do not get pleasure out of your writing, it will reflect in the final product (How-Wikihow).

There are many books on writing and countless courses from elementary through graduate school on writing, but overall they have similar guidelines and approaches. A writer must be prepared to write, use resources, have an understanding of the material being written and follow some basic theories.

Preparing to write is critical in making the best of your work, being mentally prepared to write is as important as being mentally prepared to fight a fire or do CPR. A simple mental exercise when preparing to write is helpful. Harper and Harper (2005) recommend some basic questions that will help a writer to get ready; take a few minutes and write; I hope to \_\_\_\_\_, The time of day I work best is \_\_\_\_\_, I wish I had written \_\_\_\_\_, I want to study \_\_\_\_\_, I feel strongly about \_\_\_\_\_, The three things I would like to do is \_\_\_\_\_.

Many resources are available to assist the writer, technological advances in computer software have made it almost impossible to misspell words, but proof-reading is still necessary. Dictionaries and thesauruses are equally valuable. Noble (1992) makes two helpful points regarding resources: “Don’t overuse the thesaurus” and “Don’t under-use the dictionary.” He further says, “Some writers simply don’t give the dictionary the respect it deserves, and inevitably the misstep will show in their writing.” He also point out, “The right word for the right time,” meaning there are times when a different word of the same meaning works better.

Understanding the material being written about is a little trickier; if a writer begins to write about an issue, there is a good chance they already know something about the topic and are probably well versed in that subject; but further research is necessary. This further research can solidify the knowledge or discover new or more detailed information. The more research that you do, the better you understand your subject (Harper and Harper).

Some other rules and guidelines that lead to better pieces are the size of the article, the use of multiple drafts and revisions, varying the structure and type, and entertaining the reader. Dependent upon the platform for the writing, size does matter, another change in our culture and society. Emerson reports, “Whereas 2,000 word lengths were common in the 1970s, by the early 1980s most articles were at least 500 words shorter. Many of them, as a matter of fact, were

1,000 words and less. By the end of the 1980s, the trend towards one-pagers had become well established.”

The use of technical or complicated words should be avoided. Many times a citizen reader will not understand the meaning of certain words or phrases that are common to the fire service and its members. Avoiding obscure words or words with various meaning will reduce confusion for the reader. Noble (1992) points out, “Inexperienced writers make a common mistake with fad words.

The concept of multiple drafts is used as an editing tool. You should write at least three drafts (Goldsberry, 2005) Goldsberry also recommends, “An old formula says that the second draft should be 10 percent shorter than the first. The third draft 10 percent shorter than that. And the result equals what? A net reduction of 19 percent?”

Goldsberry further says, “Readers tire of repetition.” Varying sentence structure and type by writing sentences of different lengths will help ease reading; one sentence may have 32 words while another may have only 21. Break-up long paragraphs so that the readers’ eyes may have a chance to re-focus and not get lost or lose their place and concentration. Entertaining can keep the reader interested in the topic and interest the reader for the next piece. Writers are teachers (Goldsberry). He further adds, “Good teachers understand the tricks of being showmen in front of the class.” Think back to school, a boring teacher turned the learner off and put them to sleep. Readers may not fall asleep, but will move on to the next article or worse, stop reading. Make your article logical, literate, smart and creative (Harper and Harper).



### Procedures

Descriptive research procedures were used in this research project and consisted of Literature review and interviews with various fire service and newspaper leaders in West Virginia.

Literature review consisted of vast internet searches and review of web-based material, research of periodical and text publications and previous Applied Research Projects on file in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Publications were also obtained from the author's personal library, the public library system and the administrative library of the Charleston Fire Department. Additionally, informational documents were obtained from the WV State Fire Marshal's Office, the United State Fire Administration and from the WV Press Association.

The use of literature review gained information on journalism and the various mechanics and processes for writing. Information was obtained relating to the print media industry in West Virginia and provided considerable statistical data and current information on changes being experienced by the print media in general. Information was also obtained concerning current public fire education programs, issues and concerns in various communities.

Interviews and interpersonal conversations were conducted with various fire service and political leaders, in addition to, print media representatives. The fire service leaders had intricate knowledge of the current fire service in various communities and existing public education programs. These leaders also possessed information and experience on the various print media resources in their communities. The fire service leaders also provided considerable information regarding the fire safety education and prevention needs in their respective communities.

Various newspaper representatives were also interviewed to obtain information relating to the newspaper industry within West Virginia. Due to the vast differences between weekly and daily newspapers, representatives were interviewed from both the daily and weekly print perspectives. These representatives shared information about the newspaper industry in general and offered advice to build better partnerships between their companies and the fire service. Information was also obtained in how the print media can be used to promote fire prevention and safety education.

Additional information regarding journalism, developing press releases and the newspaper industry was obtained through an interview with a West Virginia University journalism professor.

The approach of visiting and interacting with fire service leaders and representatives of the print media provided a hands-on and personable experience which allowed for an opportunity to freely discuss matters that could not be easily answered in survey questions. A great majority of those interviewed were very open and provided considerable information and an interest in the outcome of this research. Many offers were made to further assist in the development of this concept of improving fire safety education throughout the state by utilizing the print media outlets.

Interviews with political leaders were very brief and were mostly focused on the needs in their community while interviews with fire service leaders and print media representatives were much more detailed. Meetings with fire service leaders averaged approximately 90 minutes and allowed for the opportunity to discuss various public education programs and their relationships with their local print media. Time spent with print media publishers and editors averaged 75

minutes and allowed for the opportunity to share the need for improving fire prevention and safety programs.

### Limitations and Variances

The selection process for those to be interviewed was based upon the author's personal knowledge of the background and position of those selected or by the recommendations of others who felt they may be of benefit to this project. The fire service leaders interviewed were also recognized as influential and progressive in the improvement of the fire service and public safety in general. Print media representatives were also selected based upon recommendation due to their current responsibility and influence in the print industry.

Although a couple of the fire service leaders that were interviewed were relatively "new" to their position (less than one year), the majority of those interviewed had been in their current position(s) for many years. Print media representatives interviewed were all seasoned in their profession and have been in their current positions for several years.

Due to travel restraints interviews were not conducted in all areas of West Virginia, but emphasis was placed on interviewing those in the areas that contain a great percentage of the state's population.

The questions asked of those interviewed were very broad and while remaining consistent needed slight modification in wording to be more relative to one's position and expertise. Some of the questions were not relevant to all interviewed, but still provided excellent results and led to informational conversation.

Comments documented in the results section for fire service leaders and print media representatives were intentionally left anonymous by the author so that controversial statements would not be directed towards any one participant once printed in a public document.

### Results – Interviews with Fire Service Leaders

In-depth interviews were conducted with various fire service leaders; these leaders were both on the local level and with leaders with state-wide responsibilities. After a brief overview of the purpose and intent of this ARP, a list of interview questions was used to gain general information. The questions were designed to be broad and allowed for further discussion of various, thoughts ideas and concerns.

The first question, “How many full-time Fire Prevention Educators are in WV?” led to fairly predictable results. The only person found to be responsible for fire prevention education on a full-time, 100% basis was Deputy Fire Marshal Carol Nolte of the WV State Fire Marshal’s Office. With the exception of Parkersburg Fire Department, all interviewed reported that their fire prevention and education program was a shared duty by several employees, but in general, most education programs were managed by their fire prevention bureau or office. Parkersburg has one employee who dedicates 99% of his time to education initiatives. Charleston reported one employee’s focus on education was about 70%. All other interviewed departments reported that about 10% of their fire prevention’s bureau total time was used for actual education based activities.

Discussion also revealed that there is a lot more “education” done that is not in a standard and formalized education program. Inspections of businesses, schools and various other high occupancy buildings not only allows for the enforcement of building and fire code, but allows for the education of various fire prevention messages. Many times, those responsible for a building need a different type and more thorough education to ensure they know how and why to make their buildings safer.

The next question, “Are you aware of any newspaper based fire prevention programs in WV? (articles, columns, inserts, etc.)” re-enforced the problem of sporadic media use. All interviewed agreed that there are no consistent and regular newspaper based programs at present. Some departments reported that they have tried a “regular” newspaper column in the past, but for various reasons, it was not maintained. Some of those reasons were the lack of time necessary to keep the column going and the problem of running out of issues to cover.

The State Fire Marshal’s Office does have a process in which they send out press releases to all media outlets regularly. Examples of those topics include; fireworks safety, holiday safety, safety in the home (heating, smoking, cooking, etc.), smoke and carbon monoxide safety and other messages. The United State Fire Administration also provides media outlets with information after critical events in their local community; unfortunately the USFA does not always receive the details of events within a timeframe to provide information until well after the incident.

Most fire service leaders interviewed reported that they had a good working relationship with their local newspaper and were proactive working with them not only during and after incidents, but providing them with stories and information concerning safety and prevention during times of no critical events. The leaders also reported that they do try to pass along information relating to prevention and education during and after local events which are getting media attention.

“Describe your thoughts/concerns about newspaper based Fire Prevention programs.” gathered many proactive and positive results. Some of those comments were, “Good concept if consistent and flexible,” “can’t be dry, must get attention,” “must produce on time and meet or exceed deadlines,” “should be utilized in a focused manner,” “they need to be targeted towards

certain age groups,” “good idea if it can be sold to the media,” “the media spin can change the outcome of the message,” “the local press likes local names,” “repetition and consistency is the key,” “could be an effective awareness/education tool if structured properly,” “ must ensure technical accuracy & obtain appropriate permission to use resource material involved,” must eliminate redundancy of topics selected,” “a good idea if the newspaper will make a commitment to the fire service and to fire and life safety education,” “must be able to generate an interest for the public (e.g. monthly column/insert on a different topic),” “the problem with newspapers is the interest varies from community to community,” “literacy issues within rural West Virginia make this concept questionable,” and “the information could come from one source and be tailored to each community’s needs relating to fire and life safety education”

These assorted comments demonstrated that although there are many positive thoughts about a printed media education program, there are many concerns and potential hurdles to overcome to make a program consistent and sustained from community to community.

The question, “What do you believe the most important fire safety messages should be?” also had consistent responses, with both predictable answers and concerns that were somewhat unexpected. Almost all gave the most important messages to be exit drills in the home (EDITH) and ensuring that all homes have working smoke detectors. Additional concerns were over “smoking safety,” “planning an outside meeting place,” “once out, stay out,” “candles and open flames,” “early notification of fire,” and “housecleaning and storage.” The concept of residential sprinkler system education and promotion was also discussed by most leaders.

A few of those interviewed felt that another important education message should be being familiar with your surroundings and understand what the response capabilities and timeframes are in the event that one has a fire or other emergency. The concept was that most people would

be more safety and prevention conscientious if they really understood the reality of what happens when there is a fire. Some citizens do not realize how fast fire can spread or how quickly and how much damage can occur before help arrives. Citizens may not realize that some areas may have a long physical response due to distance or other factors that reduces response times. Some areas may not have adequate personnel or water supply in the early stages of an emergency. Each residence may also have its own hazards that can compound an emergency; building design, topography, fire load of contents, etc.

Another question relating to education messages was, “Describe differences between urban and rural fire prevention messages or programs.” For the most part, fire service leaders believed that there should be little difference between urban and rural areas concerning safety and prevention messages. The messages should be same, working smoke detectors and EDITH; although, these same messages may need to be presented differently because of living environments. Urban areas may have high-rise and multi-family occupancies with limited egress; while urban areas may have smaller single dwelling homes that are not as resistant to fire. Early notification may also be critical education points when there are not automatic alarms present; automatic alarms are more prevalent in urban areas. Another difference may be that of heating sources, urban areas seem to have more centralized heating and cooling systems while rural areas are more prone to utilize various heating sources like fireplaces and wood-burning stoves, portable heaters and the use of propane. Some felt that the use (and misuse) of kerosene heating can be problematic in both rural and urban areas.

The question, “What groups could benefit most from a newspaper based education campaign? (regions, age, socio/economic, ethnic, etc.)” seemed to be a rather thought provoking question that opened conversation about many issues. Most interviewed felt that the middle to

older population read the paper more and that the younger generations do not read the newspaper but obtain most of their information from TV, computers and the internet. Although a few interviewed did express that the Newspapers in Education program which places newspapers in the hands of school children who may be able to utilize safety and prevention information. This would be best if the safety messages were embraced by the schools and teachers. Business and building owners may also be a group that could be targeted with a newspaper based program. Leaders of various groups for senior citizens, children or other at risk groups may be able to utilize this approach by being able to incorporate safety information into existing programs. Groups that may not benefit from a print media based campaign could be ethnic groups that do not normally read the newspaper, although West Virginia has not experienced large culture and language barriers that other areas of the country have. Additionally, those with low literacy or certain disabilities may not benefit from this approach for again, they do not regularly read newspapers.

The question, “What are your suggestions for developing a state-wide newspaper fire prevention education program,” led to several thoughts about how to build support, but the most common answer related to communication. Many fire departments that neighbor each other or are in the same vicinity do not work together on fire safety and prevention programs with each department doing their own thing. This could be problematic for a newspaper to become involved for the fact that almost all newspapers distribute into areas covered by multiple fire departments, the larger the paper, the more fire department districts that could be impacted. Additionally, there is little networking or partnering concerning safety education on a regional and state level; although there are state-level meetings and committees that address many fire department issues like arson, EMS and hazardous materials planning, there is no committees or



work groups on a state-level specifically to address fire prevention and education. Most leaders interviewed felt that if there was a “committee” specifically to address prevention and education, departments state-wide could interact, network and share programs. Most leaders also stressed that a committee of this type would need to be structured and organized in a manner that was time efficient and worthwhile.

Other suggestions included, “identifying various stakeholders,” building support from fire service organizations,” “determining priorities,” “research new and existing programs,” “using current events and catastrophes to demonstrate that it could happen here,” “make the program seasonal based upon specific problems for that time of year,” “utilizing the state fire marshal office,” and “meet with state-wide journalist groups for sponsors and partnerships.” Many of those interviewed felt a type of consistent newspaper based fire prevention and safety message program would be good initiative, but had concerns that it may too big of a concept and needed to remain local based. It also is only one piece of a greater problem of ensuring consistent and effective prevention education to the many types of “at-risk” groups and must be combined with other education programs.

The final question was, “Who may be key leaders in this concept?” The majority of those interviewed reported that the WV State Fire Marshal’s Office would be the key to leading a fire prevention and education media campaign. Other fire service related groups and organizations that would have key leadership abilities would be the WV State Fire Commission, the WV Firefighters Association, the WV Fire Chief” Association, and the WV Professional Firefighters Association. Another key leader that would need to be greatly involved would be the WV Press Association which has many avenues in which to assist and promote initiatives in the state’s newspaper industry. Additionally other groups and fields that have safety prevention

and education goals could also become key leaders; those groups could come from, but not be limited to, law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospitals and health departments.

Discussion also included concerns about individual leadership within organizations. As with many initiatives and programs, “leadership must start from the top” was a concern that was discussed. Locally, the fire Chief and newspaper editors and publishers must be supportive and proactive to safety and prevention through the media. Fire Chiefs must also set the tone for the rest of the department’s employees to be prevention centered and proactive in public education. On the state level, leaders of the fire marshal’s office and state fire commission must also set the tone for all departments to place more of a focus on prevention and education.

The most concerning topic of discussion that was common with most fire service leaders interviewed was the issue of complacency by the public. “Nobody cares about it (fire prevention), until it is too late.” Our society has developed into somewhat of a “carefree” way of life and we as a whole do not practice safety and prevention and many times suffer loss that could have easily been prevented. Changing attitudes and beliefs about personal responsibility for ourselves and surroundings is a much greater issue than just instilling upon others the need to change their batteries twice a year. The recent national incidents of terrorism have helped the public become more aware of their own safety and accountability, but there is a lot more work to do.

### Results – Interview with a Journalism Professor

Writing and journalism instruction courses can make a significant difference in the ability of one to become an author. That difference may be as simple as being a little more comfortable with writing and it can be as complicated as identifying the audiences intended to reach.

Although many Associates and Baccalaureate degree programs have basic literacy requirements, those core curriculum courses do not go into the details of writing pieces that are to be published and read by thousands.

During the course of this research, time was spent with Mrs. Lynn Reinke, Director of Communications at West Virginia University. Mrs. Reinke was well informed of the purpose of this research and its potential impact on safety prevention and education through writing; she gave many pointers that will make a difference in understanding the journalism and print media industry. In addition to instructing students on journalism skills, she has experience as a reporter and journalist for a large metropolitan newspaper.

The newspaper industry is a business. It is owned by private individuals or companies that are in the business to make money. Although a newspaper does have some ethical responsibility to print information that can make citizens of a community safer, it is not in the business of public education or safety prevention. Mrs. Reinke expressed that newspapers print and publish community news instead of safety messages. She recommends that fire departments place an effort on developing good working relationships with their local newspaper company.

Newspaper companies have two key leaders, a publisher and an editor. The publisher usually manages the business and the editor manages the news. In a small newspaper, the editor and the publisher may be the same person, whereas, in a larger daily paper, there may be several editors each with a different focus or responsibility. The editor can be considered “the gatekeeper” for he or she makes the final decision of what is published and how much of an individual piece makes the print. Many times when a press release is submitted, one-third to one-half of the information is removed before final print. A varying amount of material may also be cut, or edited, dependent upon the amount of other news that needs to be printed. There is

a limited amount of space in any given newspaper that is available for articles; many times significant events and incidents in a given time period may take up space that could have otherwise been used for a variety of articles. It is only natural that a local plant closing with devastating job losses to a community would gather more interest than a safety message about smoke detectors; but on the other hand, a fire that claims the lives of several small children may be an interest that allows fire departments an opportunity to address safety for quite some time.

Mrs. Reinke explained many of the changes that the print media and newspaper industry has going through. Newspaper readership has undergone several changes over the past few years due to advancements in technology and a changing society. Print products are down and internet products are increasing. She also explained that a single newspaper has an average of being read by 2.5 different people; although a family of four may subscribe to a newspaper, it may be read by three or four different people, a newspaper in a barber shop may be read several people.

The common reader exhibits characteristics that must be understood when writing. A reader will scan or briefly look over an article before reading; many times only reading the key words in a piece. Sometimes the reader will go onto the next article or refocus on the piece and read it more thoroughly. With this concept in mind a writer should make a special attempt to not utilize or repeat the same words over and over. Another thought to keep in mind is the attention span of the reader. The reader may have different distractions while reading or be on a timeline having only a few minutes to read and it is critical to catch there attention quickly; the opening paragraph, may be the only paragraph read. The headline is also a key to gather interest. The headline can be even more important when using web-based delivery. The information in ten words or less may make the difference whether the article is read or not.

Many times, readers like to see the names of local people in the newspaper and are often more likely to read an article when they recognize the name of person that is seen as a neighbor instead of an official. Local papers are also more inclined to print articles that are of local interest and many times will not print material from an outside area or by authors from another community. This may be an important factor when attempting to place information in a rural area; areas often protected by volunteer organizations. Editors want to give the reader information from a source familiar to them.

One of the mistakes that is commonly made is the use of complicated words and the jargon of business. Many times, authors will assume the reader understands the meaning of the word; what is a common phrase in the fire service may not be understood by the civilian reader or worse, interpreted differently by the reader who does not have a background knowledge of the subject. Mrs. Reinke recommends that when proof-reading a fire prevention based work of writing, have a layperson, someone outside of the fire service read the article or press release. Not only may grammatical errors be noticed, the use of jargon or misunderstandings of meaning may be brought to the surface allowing the author to revise the wording or presentation of material.

Mrs. Reinke offered other suggestions on how to write when submitting an article or press release. She suggests using statistics to document facts; this makes the information more credible and validates what you write, although care should be given to not overwhelm the reader with numbers and statistics. Due to limited space available in print media, key points should be used but not repeated.

When submitting press releases to a newspaper, the writer should remember that there are essentially two audiences, the editor and the public. The public may never have the opportunity

to read the information if the editor does not feel it should be printed. Press releases may be submitted to a newspaper in a few different ways. Submitting a press release in hard copy either by mail, in person or by fax requires the editor or reporter to re-type the information which can be time consuming and allow for information to be left out. Utilizing electronic means such as e-mail or web-based submission programs allow the editor to receive all the information in a manner that is easier to replicate, but also allows for easy editing or removal of information.

Newspaper editors and reporters receive a considerable amount of information from various sources and many times are overwhelmed with the amount of “information” that is received. Print media receives documents from many sources all wishing to have their agendas promoted. Other media organizations such as the Associated Press provide countless newsworthy articles. Special interest groups also provide information relating to their cause. This flow of information can be of national, state, regional and local interest.

If various press releases are sent to a newspaper and no action is taken or the information is not published, Mrs. Reinke recommends that the provider or sender schedule a meeting with the editor to find out why information is not being utilized or published. She also suggests that fire departments have a plan to act when an incident occurs that may be media worthy. Immediately after a critical incident a media source may be the one requesting information for an article or story, having a message or other material “pre-planned” may improve the chance, quality and quantity of getting fire prevention and safety messages to the public. A different message or approach may be more effective dependent upon the nature of the incident. A fatality fire that is complicated by a battery-less smoke detector may need one message and statistics while a fatality fire originating from a child playing with matches may need another message and different data.

### Results – Interviews with Print Media Representatives

Interviews were conducted with editors and/or publishers of four different newspaper companies. Two newspapers were larger (daily print) companies with distribution to many counties while two were smaller (weekly print) companies that primarily distribute to one county. Additionally, individuals representing the West Virginia Press Association (WVPA) were interviewed to gain a state-wide perspective. The WVPA is an independent organization that coordinates and assists all of the state's newspaper companies with various aspects of the news print industry. The WVPA is in regular and routine contact with all of the state's newspapers and provides multiple support services and information sharing. The WVPA also sponsors meetings and conferences for all of the state's newspapers companies.

Interviews with the editors and publisher allowed for newspaper leaders to discuss both positive and negative experiences with the fire service and allowed the author to promote safety education initiatives. The print media leaders interviewed shared information about the newspaper industry and offered suggestions for developing better working relationships with the fire service.

Questions revealed that none of the print media representatives interviewed were aware of any specific and regular programs designed for fire prevention and safety education, all discussed past initiatives that were based on community safety. Examples were the anti-tobacco and "click it or ticket" campaigns. They also all discussed the working relationships with local fire departments; the smaller papers seemed to interact more with the local fire service due to logistical reasons. A small rural newspaper may only have a few fire departments in their

subscription areas whereas larger daily print newspapers may have several dozen fire departments in their distribution areas.

The print media industry is very complicated and varies greatly from community to community. Daily and weekly print papers are generally owned by for-profit companies with some of the larger papers owned by out of state corporations. Most revenue is created from selling advertisement space in the paper. Newspaper subscription revenue only accounts for twenty to thirty percent of overall revenue.

Although, newspapers do have some “ethical” responsibility to print material that is educational, the primary function of newspapers is to print the news, not act as a public relations source. West Virginia newspapers are also required to declare a political affiliation. Many times this “affiliation” is only evident in editorial columns, but at times, the newspaper will give more column space to interests of one political party than the other. Local political leaders and those with strong political ties can have some influence with the editorial staff dependent upon party affiliation.

Print media representatives agreed that although there is not a defined target audience, many times articles are written for a specific groups or interests based upon the demographic statistics of their readership. West Virginia newspapers have not experienced a significant change in cultural or ethnic groups like many papers around the country have. West Virginia has not experienced significant language barrier challenges. Interviews revealed that articles written in most West Virginia newspapers are at the sixth to eighth grade reading level.

Larger papers have become much more involved in the internet and web-based delivery of information. Although many smaller (weekly) papers have developed websites, the larger papers have greatly increased their internet product over the last few years. Website and internet



based material is usually viewed and read by a younger and more technical audience. Urban and rural based newspapers have other significant differences as well. Daily papers tend to print news from local to state to national to international while rural papers focus primarily on news relevant to the local community and occasionally on the state level if it may have local impact. Rural weekly papers will also go into much more detail with local news and many times serve as a follow-up to a related story, whereas larger daily papers focus on the “here and now.”

Newspapers also tend to compete with other forms of media such as radio and TV. This competition can be for both news and revenue (advertising) and ultimately, “the fight to break the news quicker.” Newspapers have an extra advantage, repetition. While TV and radio are able to capture an audience easier, it is for a very small, limited time frame that is a “one shot deal.” A 45 second story on TV and a 30 second sound bite on the radio can have many distractions and is gone. Newspaper articles require more effort on the behalf of the audience, but can be viewed many times and by many readers. A distraction or interruption may lead to a temporary loss of attention for the reader, however, a newspaper can be picked back up and reading began where the reader left off.

When the print media representatives were asked specifically about their thoughts and concerns about newspaper based fire prevention and safety programs, there were both positive and negative comments. Although there have been some “bad experiences” between the press and the fire service, all interviewed discussed a positive working relationship between the two groups.

Some fire departments go to great lengths to promote a positive media relationship while others view it as a “necessary evil”. Those organizations striving for a partnership are very willing to share information and even contact the media to report newsworthy events and provide

photographs, statistics and other resources to assist the print media. Unfortunately, there are fire departments that are not willing to share information, will not return calls and “try to avoid” the press. Many times the reasons for hesitancy are based upon authority to release information or the fear of negative repercussions from supervisors for speaking with the media.

Print media representatives stressed the need to develop a good working relationship with the press not only during times of critical events but also, working with them year round and during non-emergency events. The editors reported that “time is the enemy” and critical deadlines need to be realized by the fire service. The editors also suggested that the newspaper should not be used to “preach to the public” and that readers have “fickle” interest that is difficult to gauge or predict. Sometimes the public is interested in the safety and prevention and other times there is very little concern for the information.

The editors also suggested that each organization have at least one point of contact that is the primary liaison between the fire department and the press. This is a little easier to accomplish with career departments but can be troublesome for volunteer departments that may not have the same members present from emergency to emergency. Another recommendation was to develop a relationship between the publisher/ editor and the fire chief although the chief and editors may not be the primary points of contact. This relationship will allow for reporters and members of the fire service to improve.

When discussing columns, a couple of editors suggested leaving the writing up to reporters and editors instead of firefighters attempting to present full articles for print. An average article is about fifteen inches in column length and averages 400-450 words. Article writing is difficult and many times an author will have a good start for a few articles but will quickly lose interest in maintaining the process and begin to run out of information or topics.

Editors were receptive about beginning a fire prevention and safety program but also discussed the need to incorporate other safety based organizations in the concept. Although there is considerable fire safety and prevention messages, the readers can be “burnt-out” and other messages such as all-terrain vehicle safety and seatbelt use could make the program better rounded. Agencies such as law enforcement, emergency medical service, health departments and hospitals could also become involved and contribute greatly to the overall community safety improvement.

Another suggestion was to work with the WV Press Association and fire service leadership groups such as the WV Fire Commission to promote this program on a state-wide level, although focusing locally will be more feasible.

### Discussion

Fire safety education and prevention in West Virginia is no different than any other state, although there are some differences in what the priority topics should be, based upon where people are and live. Heating and cooking fires are still the leading cause of fires in the state and should be focused on. Fortunately in urban areas, many buildings have built in alarms and fire protection systems that have greatly reduced fire department response time and fire spread. Urban areas also have quicker response times due to fire station location and fewer geographical restraints. In rural areas a small cooking related fire can have devastating effects because of prolonged response times and delays in fire department notification.

Research revealed the most common and important safety message was that every home should have a working smoke detector. The key educational component with smoke detectors is that they work. Statistics show that many times smoke detectors are present but do not work.

Emphasis should be placed on educating the public on the importance of not only having at least one smoke detector, but checking smoke detectors and changing the batteries. This emphasis is applicable to all age groups, but especially those with responsibility for others such as parents, caregivers and building owners.

Promoting cooking and heating safety and awareness is a topic that can be easily focused on because it is relative to all communities and is not a technical or complicated subject matter. Cooking and heating is a routine and necessary activity common to all households regardless of location or age and sociological groups; although various ethnic or culture cooking differences may lead to greater fire risk. Deep frying, the use of open flames and various other means of cooking can be considered for a special focus.

Heating sources can also vary greatly from urban to rural areas. Centralized heating and cooling systems in urban multi-family dwellings are considerably much safer when compared to wood burning stoves, fireplaces and kerosene heating appliances common in rural areas. Space heaters, both gas and electric are common in all areas and should be another specific focus for education.

Early fire department notification is also a topic that needs more education; calling 911 is something that is taught at an early age and is on virtually every police car, ambulance and fire truck, but in the event of a critical crisis or emergency, people forget to call or delay the call by attempting to resolve the crisis without assistance. Promoting the installation and use of automatic fire alarms is another early notification topic that can be focused on.

Another safety message that is based upon technological advances is the installation of residential sprinkler systems. Education efforts should target new home construction and existing building renovation to promote the importance of sprinkler systems. Many times all that

is known about these systems are the cost and fear of accidental water damage and not the overall value of saving lives and property in the event of a fire. Chief Greg Fuller added, “We should build homes like we do schools and hospitals.”

Another educational focus can be on what emergency services are available to a particular community. Most people are more responsible and place a greater emphasis on practicing safety and prevention when they know that emergency help is limited or farther away. Unfortunately, many fire departments do not want to publicly admit that they may have limited resources, staffing or long response times in an effort to convince their community to practice greater safety prevention.

Other non-fire related safety messages can range from medical awareness to homeland security and terrorism topics. Medical awareness, like fire prevention can encompass many different areas like strokes and heart attacks. Law enforcement based education can also focus on a multitude of topics like drug activity, theft and personal protection. Terrorism related topics can additionally add many focus areas like suspicious packages and the awareness of surroundings.

Print media can be written in ways that will optimize reader interest and retention. Unfortunately, few in the fire service are educated, experienced or proficient in writing material to be published, especially that to be printed in the complicated newspaper industry. Partnering with the experts (journalists, reporters and editors) is critical to improving safety and education messages through the print media. The print media experts know what the reader wants to hear and how to deliver the information in a way it is well received.

This collaborative effort between the fire service and newspaper staff needs to become a common and regular process during both emergency and non-emergency times. During times of

critical events that may be of interest to the public, the fire service needs to make special efforts to provide the news media with information so that they can print a good story. The fire service should also have available a collection of statistics and supporting data that can be used to further validate the story and promote the prevention of a similar incident.

During non-emergency times, the fire service should have information, topics and messages available and ready to share in the event the newspaper is looking for material; such as a slow news day. The fire service should also be cognitive of current events around the country so that if an incident in another state gathers the interest of the local print media, information can be made available relating to the incident on a local level. Making contact with the press should be a “two way street,” the fire service should be receptive when a reporter calls looking for newsworthy information and the fire service should take a more active approach in contacting the press; if nothing more than to just maintain a working relationship.

Providing routine and informational press releases to the press will also improve the amount of safety and prevention messages reaching the public. A press release may be used immediately, archived for later use or possibly discarded, but any information that makes it to the public is a positive step. You only risk a stamp, and may gain exposure to thousands of people (Horowitz). Press releases should contain statistics and familiar names, but care should be given not to overwhelm the reader. The material in a press release should be focused and not blended with other messages. Efforts should be made to place the most important information in the opening paragraph and not extensively repeated throughout the following paragraphs. Be concise and grammatically correct. Avoid adding extra fluff words that distract from the true meaning of your press release (How-infoscavenger).

Article writing by an independent (fire service) writer on a routine basis can be positive approach but must be carefully planned and must have dedication. The writer must have an effective working relationship with the editorial staff. Planning is an essential part of regular article writing. Topics must be planned well in advance, possibly several months in advance. This will allow the writer not to overwhelm the reader with similar or repetitive information and allow for time to research and validate the writings. Editorial deadlines should also be greatly considered, always be early and have safe guards in place to ensure the writing is received. Another good habit is to have a back-up column ready or prepare a couple of columns ahead of time.

Developing the same safety and prevention message in various communities is a task that must also be well-planned and well-supported by fire service leaders. Many times fire departments do well to communicate and share information with each other during emergency operations, but all too often do not work in collaboration to promote safety and prevention in the same community. The key element to ensuring a consistent and sustained safety and prevention program in multiple communities requires complete cooperation and partnering by fire departments locally, regionally and state-wide. Fire departments must work together on the local level to partner with their local newspapers. Fire service leadership must also partner on the state level to develop programs with state-level press associations and supporters.

In addition to a change in the theory to work more closely with other and sometimes rival agencies, the fire service and all of its membership must have a change in theory to place a greater emphasis on prevention and education. This change in theory must be initiated and supported by the leaders of individual fire departments, county and regional fire department associations and by state fire service leaders.

Another change in theory should be promoting writing within the fire service; this also should begin with the leadership. Many times the will is present, but the means, resources and support to publish information are not there. Writing, for a variety of mediums, will foster a sense of pride, promote the organization and further educate the writer. The practice of writing and the accompanying research behind it can become both addictive and contagious. A writer will want to write more and further master the art and others will also become more involved in the process. With growth, writing press releases for newspapers will expand into other forms of writing and mediums used to distribute the safety message, but only with the full support of leaders and supervisors.

### Recommendations

This applied research project revealed a few various recommendations to improve getting the public education word out in the state of West Virginia helping to reduce the loss of life and property to the citizens of the state and ultimately improving their quality of life. Those recommendations revolve around three critical fundamentals; developing a public education and fire safety prevention education program that is consistent from community to community, partnering with the print media industry and most importantly, improving the fire service's commitment to public safety education and prevention.

Developing a public education and fire safety prevention program is difficult on the local level and will not be much easier on the state level, but will ensure a consistent program from community to community. On a local level, resources and personnel are very limited and efforts are often duplicated in a neighboring jurisdiction. Combining resources and sharing responsibilities and duties will help not only in reducing resource use but also by reducing time



and energy effort by already overworked staff. Neighboring departments in the same county or region should work together as a team to promote safety and prevention in the newspaper. The public education and prevention officers of these neighboring departments should have regular meetings and/or planning sessions (at least bi-monthly) with their neighbors to discuss and share programs, concerns, initiatives and activities; even lunch or breakfast meetings will make a positive impact on partnering. Neighboring departments that are in the circulation area of the same newspaper company, whether weekly or daily, should work together to evenly share the workload and eliminate any rival competition (either real or perceived). The editor of the local paper should know that the departments collectively contribute and support the safety education program. This partnership will also allow the newspaper to know who is who and who to talk to when requesting information to report emergency and non-emergency events.

On the state level, a semi-annual meeting should be arranged and facilitated by the WV State Fire Marshal's Office to allow the primary fire prevention and education officers for the state's fire departments the opportunity to get together, network, share success (and failure) stories and create working relationships across the state. Many different associations, specialties and committees (except fire prevention leaders) of the fire service have regular meetings and network regionally and state-wide. These meetings will allow for departments to not only share their activities with the WVSFMO but with other departments and ensure consistency from one region to another. This committee would also be able to work towards larger goals that could involve all of the state's newspapers with a regular article or special insert (tabloid) program.

A regular article or column program with contributions from several fire prevention leaders would share the responsibility and workload tremendously. The SFMO could be the central distributing and coordinating agency for this concept. The SFMO also has the resources

to distribute regular column and press release material to all of the state's newspaper and would serve as the liaison with the WV Press Association. Deputy Fire Marshal Carol Nolte offered to assist with a fire safety column program, but urged that it would take several writers and contributors to share the work load and maintain the program.

This committee could also work towards developing, preparing and promoting a standardized special insert for all newspapers during the Annual Fire Prevention Week every October. Although the logistics to place the same fire prevention and safety tabloid in almost five hundred thousand newspapers would be a monumental task, the total number of citizens it would reach would be well worth the effort. The WV Press Association in collaboration with various supporting fire service agencies could assist with the logistics, distribution and funding.

A state-wide fire prevention and education committee such as this would need to be well planned and structured to allow participation from both career (urban) and volunteer (rural) departments and offer convenience as well as time worthy agendas. Proper planning will alleviate the "death by committee" perceptions that plague many large initiatives. All fire service leaders interviewed were receptive to a state-wide fire prevention committee but all also re-enforced the need to make it worthwhile.

The development of local, regional or state-wide fire prevention and public safety education programs should follow the model promoted by the United States Fire Administration; the five step process. A document called Public Fire Education Planning – A Five Step Process should be a part of every fire department's library and members should be familiar with its basic guidelines and principles.

The first step, Conduct a community analysis helps to identify the need or goals of a program. Step two, develop community partnerships, demonstrates the need for collaborative

effort by many stakeholders. Step three, create an intervention strategy, is basically developing the plan to achieve the goal. The fourth step, implement the strategy, is the actual process of using various tactics to deliver the program or project. The final step, evaluate the results, is necessary to assess the program and see if it has worked or how it may be improved. This concept is very similar to the principle behind the Incident Command System (ICS), a process used every day by fire departments to mitigate emergency incidents; create a goal, identify your resources, develop the strategy, employ the tactics and review the effectiveness.

Partnering with local print media should be a common practice for all fire departments. The media outlet is needed to get the marketing message out to the public (Yokum, 2003). Even though partnering with other forms of media such as television and radio are important, print media has many benefits and should become a priority. Local newspapers can be used not only for safety and prevention education, but to promote the image of the fire service and its members. Working relationships should be established between fire chiefs and editors and between reporters and responders. In addition to partnerships with responders, a fire department liaison or public information officer should be responsible for working with the newspaper staff on a regular basis and not just during emergency operations.

The fire service should make every attempt possible to assist the press with information to make a good story, but also remain neutral and not disclose any information that could be used for further investigation. Helping the press out when they need something will promote the press helping the fire service when they need something. Robert Byers suggested that something as simple as e-mailing a digital picture from a car wreck can make a big difference in promoting a working relationship.

Another recommendation is to regularly submit press releases to the local papers based upon community needs, events and activities, but also significant events that garner national attention. If a member of the fire department has a special gift or interest in writing, fire prevention or public education then the leadership should promote and encourage occasional article or column writing which can then lead to a more consistent program. Kiurski agrees, “Contact your local print media about writing a fire safety column, or offer to have someone in your department write a guest editorial.” Cornell also adds, “Encourage your staff to publish in fire service journals.”

State level print media partnerships should be accomplished by state agencies and associations. Of course the SFMO and its staff should become more proactive with the media, but also members of the WV State Fire Commission, The WV Firefighters Association and the WV Professional Firefighters Association should strive to interact with print media leaders and show support for prevention and safety.

The final fundamental recommendation is difficult to attain and there is really no prescribed way to achieve it. The fire service, in general, from the leaders to the newest firefighters need to improve their commitment to fire prevention and ultimately educating the public on how to be safer and prevent the loss of life and property. Ken Farmer recommends that more of our firefighters get the “Emmitsburg Inoculation”. Emmitsburg, MD is the home of the United States Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy. Attending courses at the National Fire Academy not only provides training for fire service members, but also instills a sense of duty and desire for prevention, especially the public education courses. For West Virginia fire service leaders the National Fire Academy is a resource that must be used to its fullest potential, it is convenient and cost effective.

Fire service leaders need to promote prevention internally within their organizations and discourage negative attitudes about public education, fire prevention and the “we’ll put ourselves out of business” belief. Changing the mind-set of firefighters towards promoting prevention will not happen overnight and it may take years to become the “new” fire service culture but fire chiefs need to acknowledge the need and begin the process. Fire chiefs should also promote communicating more with the public both in person and through the use of writing. In some cases it may be feasible to incorporate formal education in communications and literature skills as part of an officer development program.

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Executive Fire Officer Program



## Appendix A - Interview Questions for Fire Service Leaders & Print Media Representatives

National Fire Academy - Executive Fire Officer Program - Applied Research Project - 2007

### *Getting the fire safety word out in West Virginia*

How many full-time Fire Prevention Educators are in WV?

Are you aware of any newspaper based fire prevention programs in WV? (articles, columns, inserts, etc.)

Describe your thoughts/concerns about newspaper based Fire Prevention programs.

What do you believe the most important fire safety messages should be?

Describe differences between urban and rural fire prevention messages or programs.

What groups could benefit most from a newspaper based education campaign? (regions, age, socio/economic, ethnic, etc.)

What are your suggestions for developing a state-wide newspaper fire prevention education program?

Who may be key leaders in this concept?

## Appendix B: Interview List

Ken Farmer, United States Fire Administration – April 27, 2007

Fire Chief Greg Fuller, Huntington Fire Department – May 15, 2007

Asst. Chief Ralph Kosar, Wheeling Fire Department – May 16, 2007

Fire Chief Eric Chichester, Parkersburg Fire Department – May 18, 2007  
Included Inspector Mike Beckett, Parkersburg Fire Department

Fire Chief Kevin Taylor, Beckley Fire Department – May 23, 2007

Deputy Fire Marshal Carol Nolte, WV State Fire Marshal's Office

Director Murrey Loflin, West Virginia University Fire Service Extension

Director Dale Petry, Kanawha County Emergency Services – June 04, 2007

Mayor Bob Newell, City of Parkersburg

Fire Chief Randy Stanley, Charleston Fire Department – June 05, 2007

Executive Director Gloria Flowers, WV Press Association – June 8, 2007

Publisher/Editor David Hedges, Roane County Reporter (weekly paper) – June 8, 2007

Executive Editor James Smith, Parkersburg News (daily paper) – June 6, 2007

Editor Jim Haught, Charleston Gazette (daily paper) – June 5 - 2007  
Included City Editor Robert Byers & Web Editor Dave Gustafson

Ed Given, Braxton Citizen's News (weekly paper) – May 10, 2007  
President, WV Press Association

Commission President Kent Carper – Kanawha County Commission – June 10, 2007

Director of Communications Lynn Reinke, West Virginia University – May 16, 2007

Commissioner Victor Stallard, West Virginia Fire Commission

## Appendix C: West Virginia's Daily Newspapers

| Newspaper                        | City               | County     | Phone        | Daily (M-F)        | Sunday        | Editor          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
|                                  |                    |            |              | Circulation        |               |                 |
| The Register-Herald              | Beckley            | Raleigh    | 255-4400     | 28,473             | 30,071        | Carl Antolini   |
| Bluefield Daily Telegraph        | Bluefield          | Mercer     | 327-2816     | 18,572             | 19,375        | Tom Colley      |
| Clarksburg Exponent<br>Telegraph | Clarksburg         | Harrison   | 626-1400     | 15,788             | 20,208        | John Miller     |
| Charleston Gazette               | Charleston         | Kanawha    | 348-1233     | 49,158             |               | James Haught    |
| Charleston Daily Mail            | Charleston         | Kanawha    | 348-5124     | n/a                |               | Nanya Friend    |
| Sunday Gazette - Mail            | Charleston         | Kanawha    | 348-1233     |                    | 77,120        |                 |
| The Inter-Mountain               | Elkins             | Randolph   | 636-2121     | 11,226             |               | Linda Skidmore  |
| Times - West Virginian           | Fairmont           | Marion     | 367-2500     | 11,156             | 12,358        | John Veasey     |
| Mineral Daily News-Tribune       | Keyser             | Mineral    | 788-3333     | 4,000              |               | Tony Cimaglial  |
| The Herald - Dispatch            | Huntington         | Cabell     | 526-4000     | 39,963             | 42,393        | Ed Dawson       |
| The West Virginia Daily News     | Lewisburg          | Greenbrier | 645-1206     | 4,300              |               | Bill Frye       |
| The Logan Banner                 | Logan              | Logan      | 752-6950     | 8,300              | 8,853         | Mike Browning   |
| The Journal                      | Martinsburg        | Berkeley   | 263-8931     | 18,745             | 19,368        | Maria Lorenson  |
|                                  |                    |            |              |                    |               | Geraldine       |
| The Dominion Post                | Morgantown         | Monongalia | 292-6301     | 21,125             | 25,448        | Ferrara         |
| The Moundsville Daily Echo       | Moundsville        | Marshall   | 845-2660     | 3,886              |               | Hugh Anderson   |
|                                  | Point              |            |              |                    |               |                 |
| The Register                     | Pleasant           | Mason      | 675-1333     | 4,200              |               | Kevin Kelly     |
| The Parkersburg News             | Parkersburg        | Wood       | 485-1891     | 25,551             | 30,200        | Jim Smith       |
| The Parkersburg Sentinel         |                    |            |              | 3,590              |               |                 |
| Wayne County News                | Wayne              | Wayne      | 272-3433     | 1,840              |               | Thomas George   |
| Williamson Daily News            | Williamson         | Mingo      | 235-4242     | 8,760              | 8,760         | Teddy Paynter   |
| The Weirton Daily-Times          | Weirton            | Hancock    | 748-0606     | 6,800              |               | Richard Crofton |
| The Intelligencer                | Wheeling           | Ohio       | 233-0100     | 19,746             |               | J. Michael Myer |
| Wheeling News-Register           | Wheeling           | Ohio       |              | 14,740             | 39,696        |                 |
|                                  | College Newspapers |            |              |                    |               |                 |
| The Parthenon                    | Huntington         | Cabell     | 696-6696     | 6,000              |               | Marilyn McClure |
| Marshall University              |                    |            |              |                    |               |                 |
|                                  |                    |            |              |                    |               | Christine       |
| The Daily Athenaeum              | Morgantown         | Monongalia | 293-4141     | 15,000             |               | Simmons         |
| West Virginia University         |                    |            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Daily (M-F)</b> | <b>Sunday</b> |                 |
|                                  |                    |            |              | 340,919            | 333,850       |                 |

## Appendix D: West Virginia's Non-Daily Newspapers

| <b>Newspaper Name</b>                           | <b>City</b>       | <b>County</b> | <b>Phone</b> | <b>Day(s)</b> | <b>Circulation</b> |                   |
|---|-------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Clay Free Press                                 | Clay              | Clay          | 587-7300     | Wednesday     | 4250               | Beverly Nichols   |
| The Cabell Record                               | Culloden          | Cabell        | 743-1322     | Thursday      | 1245               | Trudy Black       |
| Wirt County Journal                             | Elizabeth         | Wirt          | 275-8981     | Wednesday     | 2189               | Crystal Cox       |
| The Pendleton Times                             | Franklin          | Pendleton     | 358-2304     | Thursday      | 5009               | Ed Tallman        |
| The Gilbert Times                               | Gilbert           | Mingo         | 664-8225     | Tuesday       | 2000               | Teddy Paynter     |
| Glenville Democrat & Pathfinder                 | Glenville         | Gilmer        | 462-7309     | Thursday      | 3454               | David Corcoran    |
| Mountain Statesman                              | Grafton           | Taylor        | 265-3333     | M-W-F         | 2700               | Laura Haatvedt    |
| The Calhoun Chronicle                           | Grantsville       | Calhoun       | 354-6917     | Thursday      | 3300               | Newton Nichols    |
| The Lincoln Journal                             | Hamlin            | Lincoln       | 824-5101     | Wednesday     | 4758               | Thomas Robinson   |
| News-Sentinel                                   | Hamlin            | Lincoln       | 824-5101     | Wednesday     | 1360               | Thomas Robinson   |
| Ritchie Gazette                                 | Harrisville       | Ritchie       | 643-2221     | Wednesday     | 3326               | Denise Shiflet    |
| The Pennsboro News                              | Harrisville       | Ritchie       | 643-4947     | Wednesday     | 4107               | Connie Frederick  |
| The Hinton News                                 | Hinton            | Summers       | 466-0005     | Tuesday       | 3652               | Fred Long         |
| Hurricane Breeze                                | Hurricane         | Putnam        | 562-9881     | Thursday      | 1086               | Ron Allen         |
| The Industrial News                             | laeger            | McDowell      | 938-2142     | Wednesday     | 1750               | Greg Spinella     |
| Echo (Weekender)                                | Keyser            | Mineral       | 788-3333     | Saturday      | 4249               | Tony Cimaglia     |
| Preston County Journal                          | Kingwood          | Preston       | 329-0090     | Wednesday     | 4493               | Tina Bolyard      |
| Preston County News                             | Kingwood          | Preston       | 329-0090     | Saturday      | 3882               | Tina Bolyard      |
| Mountain Messenger                              | Lewisburg         | Greenbrier    | 647-5724     | Saturday      | 3786               | Michael Showell   |
| Coal Valley News                                | Madison           | Boone         | 369-1165     | Wednesday     | 5600               | Valeria Carpenter |
| Pocahontas Times                                | Marlinton         | Pocahontas    | 799-4973     | Thursday      | 5650               | Pamela Pritt      |
| The Montgomery Herald                           | Montgomery        | Fayette       | 442-4156     | Wednesday     | 1759               | Cheryl Keenan     |
| The Moorefield Examiner                         | Moorefield        | Hardy         | 530-6397     | Wednesday     | 4513               | Phoebe Heishman   |
| The Mullens Advocate                            | Mullens           | Wyoming       | 294-4144     | Wednesday     | 1750               | Charlene Cook     |
| Hancock County Courier                          | New<br>Cumberland | Hancock       | 564-3131     | Thursday      | 2063               | Joyce Frain       |
| Wetzel Chronicle                                | Martinsville      | Wetzel        | 455-3300     | Wednesday     | 4996               | Amy Witschey      |
| Fayette Tribune                                 | Oak Hill          | Fayette       | 469-3373     | Mon/Thurs     | 2266               | Cheryl Keenan     |
| The Parsons Advocate                            | Parsons           | Tucker        | 478-3533     | Wednesday     | 4000               | Chris Stadelman   |
| Grant County Press                              | Petersburg        | Grant         | 257-1844     | Tuesday       | 5255               | William Fouch     |
| The Barbour Democrat                            | Philippi          | Barbour       | 457- 2222    | Wednesday     | 5300               | Robert Byrne      |
| The Independent Herald                          | Pineville         | Wyoming       | 732-6060     | Wednesday     | 2121               | John Conley       |
| The Princeton Times                             | Princeton         | Mercer        | 425-8191     | Friday        | 2078               | Tammie Toler      |
| The Jackson Herald                              | Ripley            | Jackson       | 372-4222     | Tues/Thurs    | 6500               | Greg Matics       |
| Jackson Star-News                               | Ripley            | Jackson       | 273-9333     | Tues/Thurs    | 5091               | Greg Matics       |
| Hampshire Review                                | Romney            | Hampshire     | 822-3871     | Wednesday     | 7150               | Sallie See        |
| The Shepherdstown Chronicle                     | Shepherdstown     | Jefferson     | 876-3380     | Friday        | 1700               | Daniel Friend     |
| The Shinnston News & Harrison<br>County Journal | Shinnston         | Harrison      | 592-1030     | Thursday      | 3600               | Leigh Merrifield  |
| Tyler Star News                                 | Sistersville      | Tyler         | 652-4141     | Wednesday     | 3235               | Jennifer Bennett  |
| The Times Record                                | Spencer           | Roane         | 927-2360     | Thursday      | 2372               | Jim Cooper        |
| Roane County Reporter                           | Spencer           | Roane         | 927-2360     | Thursday      | 2958               | David Hedges      |
| The St. Mary's Oracle                           | St. Mary's        | Pleasant      | 684-2424     | Wednesday     | 3300               | Randa Gregg       |
| Pleasants County Leader                         | St. Mary's        | Pleasant      | 684-2424     | Saturday      | 2100               | Randa Gregg       |
| The Nicholas Chronicle                          | Summersville      | Nicholas      | 872-2251     | Thursday      | 8900               | Matthew Yeager    |
| Braxton Citizens-News                           | Sutton            | Braxton       | 765-5193     | Tuesday       | 6425               | Edward Given      |
| Braxton Democrat-Central                        | Sutton            | Braxton       | 756-5555     | Friday        | 3318               | Craig Smith       |

|                          |                     |           |          |           |               |                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| The Monroe Watchman      | Union<br>Webster    | Monroe    | 772-3016 | Thursday  | 4200          | Craig Mohler       |
| The Webster Echo         | Springs<br>Webster  | Webster   | 847-5828 | Wednesday | 3152          | Thomas Clark       |
| Webster Republican       | Springs             | Webster   | 847-5828 | Wednesday | 1005          | Thomas Clark       |
| Welch News               | Welch               | McDowell  | 436-3145 | M-W-F     | 4700          | Shanelle Rucker    |
| The Brooke County Review | Wellsburg           | Brooke    | 737-0946 | Friday    | 1350          | J.W. Wallace       |
| The Herald Record        | West Union          | Doddridge | 873-1600 | Tuesday   | 2763          | Virginia Nicholson |
| The Weston Democrat      | Weston              | Lewis     | 269-1600 | Wednesday | 7025          | Robert Billeter    |
| The Putnam Democrat      | Winfield            | Putnam    | 586-2451 | Thursday  | 1029          | Fritzi Whitney     |
| The Morgan Messenger     | Berkeley<br>Springs |           | 258-1800 | Wednesday | n/a           | John Douglas       |
| <b>Total Circulation</b> |                     |           |          |           | <b>189820</b> |                    |

## Appendix E: West Virginia's College Newspapers

| Name of Paper         | School                      | City          | Phone    | Advisor               |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Concordian            | Concord University          | Athens        | 384-5303 | Ron Burgher           |
| The Tower             | Bethany College             | Bethany       | 829-7962 | Gael Cooper           |
| Bluefieldian          | Bluefield State College     | Bluefield     | 327-4159 | n/a                   |
| The Pharos            | WV Wesleyan College         | Buckhannon    | 473-8004 | Dan Heynan            |
| The Eagle             | University of Charleston    | Charleston    | 357-4716 | n/a                   |
| The Senator           | Davis & Elkins College      | Elkins        | 637-1900 | Kent McCoy            |
| The Columns           | Fairmont State University   | Fairmont      | 367-4254 | Beth Slusser          |
| The Glenville Mercury | Glenville State College     | Glenville     | 462-4133 | Patrick Hall          |
| The Yellow Jacket     | WV State University         | Institute     | 766-3212 | Robin Brown-Broughton |
| Pasquino              | Potomac State College       | Keyser        | 788-6800 | Fred Jacoby           |
| Tech Collegian        | WVU Institute of Technology | Montgomery    | 442-3180 | Bill Arnold           |
| The Highlander        | Ohio Valley University      | Vienna        | 865-6111 | Holly Cunningham      |
| The WVU-P Chronicle   | WVU at Parkersburg          | Parkersburg   | 424-8000 | Dottie Bibbee         |
| Battler Columns       | Alderson Broaddus College   | Philippi      | 457-1700 | Jeff del Cole         |
| The Green and White   | Salem-Teikyo University     | Salem         | 782-5228 | Tina Huggins          |
| Shepherd College      | Shepard University          | Shepherdstown | 876-5377 | Jim Lewin             |
| Picket                | West Liberty State College  | West Liberty  | 336-8213 | n/a                   |
| Trumpet               |                             |               |          |                       |

### NOTE:

Newspapers for West Virginia & Marshall Universities are listed with daily publications  
Circulation numbers unavailable

## Appendix F – State & National Press Associations

| <b>State Based Associations</b>                | <b>City</b>    | <b>State</b> | <b>Phone Number</b> |
|--|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Alabama Press Association                      | Birmingham     | AL           | 205-871-7737        |
| Arkansas Press Association                     | Little Rock    | AR           | 501-374-1500        |
| Arizona Newspaper Association                  | Phoenix        | AZ           | 602-261-7655        |
| California Newspaper Publishers Association    | Sacramento     | CA           | 916-288-6000        |
| Colorado Press Association                     | Denver         | CO           | 303-571-5117        |
| Florida Press Association                      | Tallahassee    | FL           | 850-222-5790        |
| Georgia Press Association                      | Atlanta        | GA           | 770-454-6776        |
| Idaho Press Association                        | Boise          | ID           | 208-375-0733        |
| Illinois Press Association                     | Springfield    | IL           | 217-241-1300        |
| Hoosier State Press Association                | Indianapolis   | IN           | 317-803-4772        |
| Iowa Newspaper Association                     | Des Moines     | IO           | 515-244-2145        |
| Kansas Press Association                       | Topeka         | KS           | 785-271-5304        |
| Kentucky Press Association                     | Frankfort      | KY           | 502-223-8821        |
| Louisiana Press Association                    | Baton Rouge    | LA           | 225-344-9309        |
| Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association | Salem          | MA           | 978-546-3400        |
| Michigan Press Association                     | Lansing        | MI           | 517-372-2424        |
| Minnesota Newspaper Association                | Minneapolis    | MN           | 612-332-8844        |
| Missouri Press Association                     | Columbia       | MO           | 573-449-4167        |
| Mississippi Press Association                  | Jackson        | MS           | 601-981-3060        |
| Montana Newspaper Association                  | Helena         | MT           | 406-443-2850        |
| North Carolina Press Association               | Raleigh        | NC           | 919-787-7443        |
| North Dakota Newspaper Association             | Bismarck       | ND           | 701-223-6397        |
| Nebraska Press Association                     | Lincoln        | NE           | 402-476-2851        |
| New Jersey Press Association                   | West Trenton   | NJ           | 609-406-0600        |
| New Mexico Press Association                   | Albuquerque    | NM           | 505-275-1241        |
| Nevada State Press Association                 | Carson City    | NV           | 775-885-0866        |
| New York Newspaper Publishers Association      | Albany         | NY           | 518-449-1667        |
| New York Press Association                     | Albany         | NY           | 518-464-6483        |
| Ohio Newspaper Association                     | Columbus       | OH           | 614-486-6677        |
| Oklahoma Press Association                     | Oklahoma City  | OK           | 405-524-4421        |
| Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association        | Portland       | OR           | 503-624-6397        |
| Pennsylvania Newspaper Association             | Harrisburg     | PA           | 717-703-3000        |
| South Carolina Press Association               | Columbia       | SC           | 803-750-9561        |
| South Dakota Newspaper Association             | Brookings      | SD           | 800-658-3697        |
| Tennessee Press Association                    | Knoxville      | TN           | 865-584-5761        |
| Texas Daily Newspaper Association              | Austin         | TX           | 512-476-4351        |
| Texas Press Association                        | Austin         | TX           | 512-477-6755        |
| Utah Press Association                         | Salt Lake City | UT           | 801-308-0268        |
| Virginia Press Association                     | Glen Allen     | VA           | 804-521-7570        |
| Washington Newspaper Publishers Association    | Seattle        | WA           | 206-634-3838        |
| Allied Daily Newspapers of WA                  | Olympia        | WA           | 360-943-9960        |
| Wisconsin Newspaper Association                | Madison        | WI           | 608-238-7171        |
| West Virginia Press Association                | Charleston     | WV           | 304-342-1011        |
| Wyoming Press Association                      | Cheyenne       | WY           | 307-635-3905        |

## Regional and National Based Associations

|   |                     |    |              |
|---|---------------------|----|--------------|
| Suburban Newspapers of America              | Traverse City       | MI | 888-486-2466 |
| Southern Newspaper Publishers Association   | Atlanta             | GA | 404-256-0444 |
| National Newspaper Association              | Columbia            | MO | 573-882-5800 |
| National Newspaper Association (Washington) | Arlington           | VA | 703-534-1278 |
| Newspaper Association of America            | Arlington           | VA | 571-366-1000 |
| American Society of Newspaper Editors       | Reston              | VA | 703-453-1122 |
| Inland Press Association                    | Des Plaines         | IL | 847-795-0380 |
| Maryland/Delaware/DC Press Association      | Crofton             | MD | 410-721-4000 |
| New England Press Association               | Boston              | MA | 617-373-5610 |
| New England Newspaper Association           | Salem               | MA | 978-744-8940 |
| Canadian Community Newspaper Association    | Toronto,<br>Ontario |    | 877-305-2262 |